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U.S. Army Considered Using Barbie as an Agent

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In the three years ending in 1967, the U.S. Army seriously considered "reactivating" Gestapo leader Klaus Barbie as an intelligence agent in South America, where it had smuggled him in 1951 to prevent his extradition to France.

According to the 218-page report released Tuesday by the Justice Department on the U.S. role in concealing Barbie's identity, the Army twice thought of rehiring Barbie: in 1965,

when it was considering starting an intelligence network in South America, and in 1967, when it was told that Barbie was a friend of many high-ranking Bolivian army officers.

The Justice report said that both times the Army was talked out of rehiring Barbie by the CIA. That is the first hint that the CIA was aware that the Army's Counterintelligence Corps had hired, protected and resettled Barbie, who was being hunted by France.

Barbie now awaits trial in that country for war crimes he is accused of committing while head of the Gestapo in Lyons during the German occupation of France.

The Justice report cites a CIA memorandum that "discouraged the Army's interest in reactivating Barbie."

According to the memo, the CIA told the Army that the "allegations of war crimes against Barbie required serious consideration ... since exposure of the CIC's role in evacuating Barbie [from Europe] would have serious consequences," especially if the CIC used Barbie in South America.

According to the Justice report, the CIA also told the Army that Barbie would have to provide "unique information of significant importance under secure operational

conditions" before the CIA would approve of the Army's reactivation of Barbie.

Justice said that the CIA expressed a "generally negative reac-

tion to recontacting Klaus Barbie without a clear understanding that the potential gain outweighed the manifest risks."

Despite the CIA warnings, the Justice report said, the Army did not lose interest in Barbie until 1968, three years after first considering Barbie's reactivation. A message from the Army to the CIA dated in April, 1968, stated that the Army had "terminated" its interest in using Barbie as an agent.

"The Army rejected the possibility because of the sensitivity of the case," the Justice report said. "The CIA discouraged the idea, based on the Army's past role in assisting Barbie and insisted on assurances that Barbie could be operated with stringent security on highly important matters before it would consider approving his use."

Barbie lived in La Paz, Bolivia, for 33 years as Klaus Altmann, the name he had been given by the CIC when he was smuggled out of Europe in 1951 with a forged Bolivian entry visa and false identity papers.

He apparently ran a lumberyard in La Paz at the same time he was used as a "contact man" in South America by a German industrial firm, whose executives told the CIC about his friendship with Bolivian generals and colonels.

"This is what piqued the Army's renewed interest in Barbie," said a source close to the Justice investigation of Barbie. "The Army said to itself, 'Here's a tested former agent who's ingratiated himself to some high-ranking military people in South America where trouble might brew some day. Why not use him again?'"

The Justice report of Barbie's friendship with Bolivian generals may explain why Barbie was not extradited by Bolivia to France until this year, 11 years after his cover was exposed. In January, 1972, Beate Klarsfeld, a French Jew and war-crimes investigator, announced at a news conference in La Paz that Altmann was Barbie.

"Altmann" denied the charge. But a few weeks later France asked Bolivia to extradite him to stand trial in France for war crimes. Urged by the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith to press for Barbie's extradition, the State Department told Bolivia that "it was inclined to the view" that the United States had "no interest in protecting" Altmann.

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